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1917

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A Rural Comedy

in One Act

THE
JONESVILLE
EXPERIENCE
MEETING

By Harry M. Doty

Chatham, N. Y.

Price Fifteen Cents

“The Jonesville Experience Meeting”

A Rural Comedy in One Act

By Harry M. Doty

Author of “In Old New England,” “Sackett’s Corner Folks,”

“Spriggins’ ‘Quiet’ Afternoon,” “The Jonesville Sewing

Circle,” “The Jonesville Board of Assessors,

“The Jonesville Grange Initiation.”

Amateur Production Free.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

Prudence Skinner—Who has a little horticultural experience.

Mary Jane Davis—In whose dollar there were but ninety-five cents.

Sarah Ann Gibbs—Who made a brave effort along millinery lines.

Josephine Tidditt—Who illuminated one extremity of her better half.

Charity Griffin—Who has boarded her last parrot.

Julia Hopper—Who learned a few things about human nature.

Caroline Squires—Who did a little "sassin"!

Harriet Hicks—Who didn't interfere much with the village barber's business.

Mrs. Peckham—Whose tears were not those of sorrow.

Isabella Peters—Who gave the old rooster a new job.

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"The Jonesville Experience Meeting"

(Scene—The Jonesville church parlor).

(Table or flat-topped desk rear center. Chairs for all ladies who take part)

(Enter Prudence Skinner and Mary Jane Davis.)

Prudence—My land, we're the first ones here and I was all flustered because I was afraid I'd be late.

Mary J.—So was I but I just simply had to wait until I could finish churnin' and it begun to seem as if that butter would never come.

Prudence—Don't it beat all how pesky mean things always act at a time like that?

(Enter Sary Ann Gibbs and Charity Griffin.)

Sary—How de do. We're in time after all, ain't we? Was afraid we'd be late.

Charity—Goodness gracious. I might just as well have made another batch of cookies as not. Guess I'd had plenty of time.

Prudence—That's so. Two o'clock nowadays means three when these meetin's are held.

Mary J.—I suppose we hadn't ought to say anything. You know it's fashionable nowadays to be late.

Charity—Mebbe 'tis but, lettin' me be the judge, it's a poor fashion.

Sary Ann—Do such folks try it with the railroad trains?

Prudence—Only on the—(supply name of local railroad) That's one place where you can most always be late and still be in time.

(Enter Josephine Tiddit and Julia Hooper).

Josephine—Hello, everybody. We thought we'd be late, but there seems to be some several missin' yet.

Julia—And I nearly hurried myself out of breath fer fear ev'rything would be over when I got got here.

(Enter Caroline Squires and Harriet Hicks)

Charity—Hello, here's two more. If it keeps up at this rate, we'll soon have enough for a meetin'.

Caroline—We'd been here sooner, but we dropped in on the way to see if the bride was ready.

Sary Ann—Who do you mean, Isabella Peters?

Harriet—Yes. You know she wanted to earn a dollar like the rest of us.

Prudence—Is she comin'?

Caroline—Yes but she wan't quite ready when we called and she asked us not to wait for her.

Mary Jane—Wan't fryin' more eggs, was she?

Sary Ann—Wan't that the richest thing you ever heard?

Charity—What do you mean? Guess I didn't hear about that.

Josephine—You didn't? I thought everyone knew it.

Julia—What was it? Do tell us about it.

Caroline—Well, you know she worked in a store for a good many years and lived in a boardin' house. Didn't know the first thing about cookin' or bakin' and didn't try to learn. When Tom Peters married her, he wanted her to go and live with his mother fer a spell and learn how to cook and take care of a house, but she wouldnt listen to it. She said she wanted a home of her own and that she could get a cook book and learn all she needed to know.

Harriet—I wonder Tom lived through it.

Caroline—Well, he did or has somehow or other.

Prudence—Sometimes it was pretty hard livin' fer him.

Mary Jane—So I'm told. They tell me he used to keep crackers and cheese and dried herring out in the corn house and eat some of 'em before ev'ry meal to keep from starvin' to death.

Charity—Pretty poor fodder, I call that, fer steady diet.

Josephine—Any port in a storm. The poor man had to have somethin' he could eat.

Julia—But what about the eggs?

Caroline—Oh, yes, I was goin' to tell you about that. One noon Tom went into the house and Isabella was standin' over a

hot stove, most roasted, watchin' suthin' in a fryin' pan. She told Tom she was sorry dinner was late, but that she'd been tryin' fer an hour to fry some eggs and they wan't no nearer done than when she begun. Tom looked in the fryin' pan and begun to laugh. When she wanted to know what he was laughin' at he told her he guessed both he and she would die of starvation before she could fry them eggs with the shells on.

Prudence—What's that? Tryin' to fry eggs with the shells on?

Caroline—That's just what she was tryin' to do. Said she supposed the shells dissolved or melted or suthin' as soon as they got hot.

Mary Jane—Ain't that about the best you ever head?

Josephine—Great, but I don't know as it's any better then her experience with the pancakes.

Julia—Guess that's a new one. What was there about it?

Josephine—Why they sot down to breakfast one mornin' and after Tom had took a mouthful of pancake he jumped up from the table, upsot two or three chairs and ran out doors as fast as he could go. He run to the pump and begun to rinse out his mouth. Isabella followed him and wanted to know what was the matter. "What did you have in that syrup pitcher?" says Tom. "Why syrup, of course?" says Isabella. "Funniest tastin' syrup I ever run across," says Tom, "Where did you get it. "Why out of the can in the kitchen" she says. "Sufferin' bullfrogs," says Tom. "That wasn't syrup, that was oil fer my mowin' machine." It seems Tom told her that mornin' that he was goin' to git some syrup down to the store but it turned out that he couldnt git it. He brought home the machine oil instead and didn't think to tell her he couldn't git the syrup. That's why she thought there was syrup in the can and put a lot of it in the syrup pitcher.

Julia—Well, the poor man is certainly havin' a hard time of it.

Caroline—Oh, he's gittin' along pretty well now, I guess. Leastwise I hear he's got so he don't keep nothin' but crackers fer lunch out in the corn house and that looks as if he's able to

eat more things in the house. His sister tells me Isabella is gittin' on fairly well although she does some laughable things now and then. Anyhow she's tryin' her best to learn and that's more'n you can say of some of them city girls that marry farmers.

Harriet—That's right and when you see one of 'em doin' the best she can, you feel more like helpin' 'em.

Prudence—(Looking off stage.) Here comes Mrs. Peckham. Now we can begin the meetin'. I'll bet everyone is just akin' to tell how she earned her dollar. I know I am.

..Mary Jane—So am I.

(Enter Mrs. Peckham)

Mrs. P.—How de do, everybody. Here I be behind again like the old cow's tail but I just couldn't help it. Just as I was ready to start, Johnny come runnin' into the house and told me the old Brahmer hen was a hatchin' her chickens, and, land sakes, them Brahmers is so clumsy that I knew she'd squish ev'ry one of them chickens if I didn't take 'em out from under her and bring 'em in the house until they get strength enough to be put out with another hen if we can find one that'll take 'em. Well, I've kept you waitin' long enough. Let's git down to business. (Takes seat behind desk.) Meetin' will come to order. (Ladies all take seats.)

Sary Ann—Shall I call the roll?

Mrs. P.—No, never mind that; it will take too much time.

Sary Ann—Glad of that because I come away in such a hurry that I forgot the book with them names in it.

Mrs. P.—Just as well. Now we'll do away with the preliminaries. You all know this is the meetin' fer tellin' our experiences durin' the last month in earnin' the dollars for the benefit of the society. Anybody that wants it can have the floor. (Ladies look at each other, each waiting for the other to begin.)

Charity—Guess you'll have to call on someone, Mrs. Peckham. Nobody seems to want to take the lead.

Mrs. P.—All right. Josephine, let's hear from you first.

Josephine—I hardly want to be first because I feel that some of the others earned their dollars in so much better ways. However, I'll begin. I earned my dollar by blacking my husband's shoes.

Julia—Well, of all things. I'd like to see myself on my knees before any man.

Josephine—I blacked them when they was off his feet.

Julia—Oh, that's different.

(Enter, hurriedly, Isabella Peters)

Isabella—Oh dear, here I am way behind time. I knew I'd be. Is the meeting most over?

Caroline—No, only just started.

Isabella—Oh, I'm so glad. I do so dislike to be late but I just couldn't help it. I've been having a terribly provoking time with my chickens today and I didn't get things straightened out until a short time ago.

Harriet—What happened? Fox get into the flock?

Isabella—No, I wanted to raise some chickens this year so I've been setting some eggs I sent away for. They just came this morning.

Prudence—Had some trouble with 'em, did you?

Isabella—Yes I did, lots of it. You see our hens have been doing so nicely of late that it seemed a shame to make one of them stop laying and set on those eggs so—

Mary Jane—Didn't you have no setters?

Isabella—Any what?

Mary Jane—Any setters, hens that wants to set.

Isabella—I don't know. I didn't try to make any of them set.

Sary Ann—What's that? Make 'em? Woman, don't you know that one of the impossible things in this world is to make a hen set if she don't want to?

Isabella—Why no, I didn't know that. I supposed they would set any time you wanted them to.

Charity—Well, they won't and, on the other hand when they git their minds made up they're goin' to set, they're goin to.

Argument ain't no use. The only way to change their minds at a time like that is to cut off their tails just behind their ears.

Isabella—Well, I didn't have that to contend with. I didn't try to have a hen set.

Josephine—I thought you said the eggs is bein' sot on.

Isabella—Yes, they are.

Julia—Well, fer land sakes. If a hen ain't settin' on 'em, what is?

Isabella—Why, the rooster. (Ladies all laugh.)

Harriet—The rooster!

Isabella—Yes, he is, but I had an awful time making him do it

Mrs. Peckham—I ain't got the least bit of doubt about that.

Isabella—Of course, roosters don't lay eggs. They don't do anything but walk around so I thought he might better be spending his time hatching chickens so the hens could keep on laying.

Prudence—Don't you know that rooster won't stay on them eggs? Roosters don't never set.

Isabella—This one will. He's doing splendidly.

Mary Jane—Well if that don't beat all I ever heard of. How do you expect to make him stay on that nest?

Isabella—I got a soap box, put straw in it, put in the eggs and put the rooster on them but he kept getting off. Then I held him on while I tacked over the box a piece of cloth with a hole in it large enough for him to get his head through. Then I put a bushel basket upside down over the nest because I've heard fowls prefer to set where it's dark. When I left he had found out he's got to stay on that nest and he wasn't wiggling—that is, not much.

Sarah Ann—Well, we learn suthin' new ev'ry day. Isabella, I wish you luck. If your scheme works, the roosters in this here neighborhood has got a hard time ahead of 'em from now on.

Isabella—Before I forget it I want to say I earned my dollar making shirts for Tom. I was to make three but when I finished the first one and showed it to him, he said I needn't make

any more and he gave me the dollar right then and there. Wasn't that fine of him? He said there wasn't any use of keeping it for best and he put it on the very next morning and all this week he has worn it while he worked.

Harriet—(Aside). My land, she don't see why he stopped her after he saw that first shirt.

Mrs. P—Now ladies, let's get back to the work we have on hand. We're ready to listen to the other experiences in earning the dollars. Caroline, how did you earn yours?

Caroline—I canned fruit for young Mrs. Applebee.

Harriet—The idea of a woman having to have someone can her fruit fer her.

Prudence—I say so, too. I wonder what Caleb Applebee thinks now of that chit of a wife of hissen. He wouldn't take a girl from right here at home who knows how to do things.

Mary Jane—Yes, he might have had Virginia Thatcher.

Sary Ann—Of course he might. Virginia's mother done everything but ask Caleb to marry the girl.

Charity—That's true, I guess, but while Virginia can put up sass, she's got so many other shortcomings that I don't know whether Caleb would have been much better off than he is now. You know her stock of ambition ain't very big.

Josephine—That's so, too.

Mrs. Peckham—Ladies we're a gittin' away from our subject agin. Julia, how did you earn your dollar.

Julia—I went out collectin' bills fer my husband, rather, I tried to collect. Never had such a time in my life. It was the hardest work I ever done. Some folks fairly insulted me when I asked 'em to pay their honest debts, accounts that had been runnin' fer months. I was collectin' on ten per cent commission and before I earned the dollar, I had wore out at least two dollars' worth of shoe leather. Had to go three and four times for some bills. But I learned somethin' about human nater and that is that some of the folks in this town that are the poorest pay are them that thinks themselves the biggest toads in the puddle. Some of 'em ain't as good pay as the average men with a

big family, who has hard scratchin' to make ends meet, men these high-toned folks wouldn't look at.

Caroline—That's right. They're puttin' on airs with other folks' money.

Mrs. Peckham—Now we will hear from Prudence.

Prudence—I took care of Mrs. Gosset's flower bed.

Mary Jane—While she wuz runnin' around, tryin' to organize that village improvement society, I 'spose.

Sary Ann—Village improvement society, indeed! If there's any place in this town that needs improvin' worse 'n her's does, I'd like to know where 'tis.

Charity—That's right. I don't believe that back yard of hers has been cleaned in years.

Josephine—And the house needs paintin'.

Julia—And that front fence of hers looks like a fright.

Caroline—And there's any quantity of burdocks right in the front dooryard.

Mrs. Peckham—Ladies, we're gittin' side-tracked agin. Mary Jane, how was your dollar earned?

Mary Jane—I picked peaches fer 'Squire Higgins.

Harriet—I didn't know as them knotty, gnarly old trees of hissen ever had a peach on 'em.

Prudence—Don't see how they could. He never trims 'em or sprays 'em and is too stingy to hire it done.

Sarah Ann—I'll bet you didn't find many peaches.

Mary Jane—No, I didn't, not good ones. When he looked at what I'd picked, he wanted to settle with me for fifty cents.

Charity—You didn't let him beat you down, did you?

Mary Jane—Not a cent. I told him a bargain was a bargain and I couldn't help it if there wan't as many peaches as he expected.

Josephine—What did he do then, want you to take part of your pay in peaches?

Mary Jane—Yes, that's just what he done but I told him nothin' would fill the bill 'cept somethin' representin' one hundred cents, I didn't care whether 'twuz a greenback, big, round silver dollar or change.

Julia—What did he give you?

Mary Jane—Four quarters, one of 'em Canadian, that I couldn't git but twenty cents fer so he got five cents the best of me in end.

Caroline—Ain't he the old pig, though?

Mrs. P—Sary Ann, what sort of a time did you have gittin' your money together?

Sary Ann—I trimmed a hat for Mrs. Snodgrass.

Harriet—(Aside). My land, I wondered where she got that freak of a bonnet.

Prudence—(Aside). Well of all things. From the looks of that headpiece I thought Josiah Crumpit, the shoemaker, must have trimmed it.

Mary Jane—I'm surprised to think she paid you.

Sary Ann—She hasn't yet so I've advanced the dollar myself but I think she will.

Charity—I'm prophesyin' that if you keep that idee, you'll overwork your thinkin' apparatus.

Josephine—She's owed me two years fer a dozen eggs. Duns herself every time she sees me but that's as fur as she gits.

Julia—And we never got a cent fer a kitchen chair she bought at our auction.

Caroline—Sary Ann, I guess you'll always have sumthin' comin'.

Sary Ann—Mebbe so but that's the only opportunity I saw fer earnin' a dollar.

Harriet—You'll earn a couple more, tryin' to git it.

Mrs. Peckham—Ladies, ladies, we'll never git through with this meetin' if we don't stick closer to the subject. Now let's

see, who'll be next? Charity, what was your method of earnin' a dollar?

Charity—I boarded Mrs. Foskit's parrot while she was visitin' her sister down to Fuddletown.

Prudence—Puttin' out a parrot to be boarded? I never heard of such a thing. Why didn't she take it with her?

Charity—That's what I wondered at the time but I soon found out. I wouldn't have that bird in the house again if she'd pay me ten dollars. I never was so mortified in my life.

Mary Jane—How was that?

Charity—That bird uses dreadful swear words and he was always sure to act the worst when someone was in to call. I never felt so ashamed as I did one afternoon when the minister came to our house. We happened to mention the new dam that was bein' built down by the grist mill. When the bird heard that word, he started in and kept sayin' it with so many other awful words connected with it that I finally just grabbed that cage and took it, bird and all, out into the woodshed. And that wasn't the worst of it. When I went back into the room, the minister said he believed he'd come over some evenin' and see my husband and have a little talk with him about his spiritual welfare. I saw in a minute that he thought the bird had learned them awful words from John and I don't believe John ever swore in his life. I was so wrought up I didn't know what to do. Forgot all about givin' the minister a little lunch and I guess he noticed it becuz he ain't called since.

Sary Ann—You was lucky if that's all the bird done. I'd a wrung his neck. I've heard about that parrot before.

Charity—But that wasn't his worst caper while he was there. John's cousin, Ann Maria from Bartlettville, come to stay over night with us. You know how prim and precise she is and I didn't want her shocked, so I put the parrot in the storeroom right next to the room where she slept. That storeroom is pitch dark and I've always heard birds won't make a sound unless they're where there is plenty of light. It didn't seem to me she'd been to bed more'n ten minutes afore she come a rushin'

down stairs, white as a sheet. She couldn't talk for a minute but finally we got her calmed some and she said the house was haunted.

Josephine—What had she seen, a ghost?

Charity—We asked her that and she said she hadn't seen none but that she'd heard one right next to her room. Said she heard a ghost say, plain as day, two or three times. "Abandon hope, all ye who enter here." You see it was that pesky parrot.

Julia—No wonder she saw was scared. I'd a been myself.

Charity—Once when a rehearsal fer a play was bein' held in Mrs. Foskit's house, someone had to say the words: "Abandon hope, all ye who enter here" and since that time the parrot has said 'em every once in a while. Of course I had to tell Ann Maria all about the bird then but she was so upset she wouldn't sleep in that room so I had to make up a bed for her on the lounge in the sittin' room. No amount of money could hire me to board that parrot again.

Mrs. P.—Now, Harriet, you're the only one left to tell about earnin' a dollar.

Harriet—I earned mine cuttin' my husband's hair.

Caroline—What, got a dollar fer one hair cut?

Harriet—That's how it turned out although the bargain was that I was to git twenty-five cents each time.

Prudence—Then how did it happen you got a dollar fer once?

Harriet—After I'd cut it, he got up and looked in the glass and didn't seem quite satisfied. I told him if he thought I hadn't finished, I'd cut it some more but he said he thought I'd cut enough off, anyway in some places. Then he wanted his cap that turns down over his ears and the back of his neck and for three or four weeks afterward he wore it whenever he went to the village although it was so warm there wan't the slightest danger of his ears freezin'. When he needed another hair cut I offered to do it fer him but he said the barber owed him and he'd made up his mind to trade it out. I guess my hair cuttin' didn't suit him but he kept his word about the dollar.

Mary Jane—Beats all how pertickler some men is, don't it?

Mrs. P.—Well, ladies, that ends the relatin' of experiences and I compliment you all on the success of your efforts. If there is no objection, the money will be placed in the society treasury. (Pauses). Hearing none it is so ordered.

Isabella—Why, Mrs. Peckham, you haven't told us how you earned your dollar.

Sary Ann—That's so. How did you do it?

Charity—Yes, Mrs. Peckham, we want to hear from you.

Mrs. P.—My experience was of so little consequence that I wan't goin' to mention it.

Josephine—But it isn't fair not to tell it.

Mrs. Peckham—Well, my experience was one that caused me many tears.

Julia—Oh, Mrs. Peckham, I am so sorry. That took all the pleasure out of it, didn't it.

Mrs. Peckham—Not particularly. You see I earned my dollar by gratin' horseradish.

Caroline—Well of all things. No, them ain't tears of sorrow but they come pretty near it unless the gratin' is done outdoors on a windy day.

Mrs. P.—Yes, I grated horseradish, bottled it and sold it down to the store. I could have sold more but I'd rather earn money some other way unless it's fer some such purpose as this.

Isabella—Now before we adjourn, I have a suggestion to make. It seems to me Jonesville is getting to be considerable of a place for gossip and I believe this society can do something toward stopping it.

Harriet—Isabella, you are right. Ev'rybody knows there ain't no gossips in this society and we should try to have other folks pattern after us.

Isabella—I have prepared a little resolution we might adopt.

Mary Jane—Excellent. Read it to us.

Isabella—(Reads). Whereas—Gossip, fault-finding and criticism is an evil that gnaws at the very vitals of any community and

Whereas—It should be discouraged in every possible way, therefore be it

Resolved—That the ladies' aid society of the Jonesville church most earnestly requests every resident in this community to be more careful and more circumspect and to guard against saying behind one's back anything they would not care to say to that person's face."

Sary Ann—Fine. Something like that is needed in Jonesville.

Charity—It surely is. The resolution should be made public and I believe it will cause more folks to follow in our footsteps by bein' careful what they say about one another. I'm goin' to vote fer it.

Josephine—So am I.

Mrs. P.—Ladies, you've all heard the resolution as read by Isabella. All in favor of its adoption, please so signify by rising. (All rise quickly). It is unanimously adopted. We will have it spread upon the records of the society and a copy prepared for publication. Now if there is no other business to come before the meeting, we will adjourn by singing (Ladies may sing any selection deemed appropriate.)

CURTAIN.

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